

# Strange Occurrences Over Xbox Live

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Summary: A journal I am keeping of bizarre happenings that I have recently been experiencing over Xbox Live.

## 1. The First Encounters

### ENTRY # 1 " THE FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Something very strange is happening with my Xbox 360 and I don't know who to talk to. It started maybe a week ago. I've left some messages with the tech support for Microsoft, but none of the few responses I've gotten have yielded any real assistance. Then again, I'm not sure why Microsoft tech support would know how to help me, because everything that's going on is just so bizarre. But I'm probably getting ahead of myself. I'm going to start detailing events from the beginning, and I'll keep this file as a journal that I'll update every time something occurs. It may seem strange that I'm keeping a journal log of what could possibly just be a bunch of glitches. But when you read the nature of the things that are going on, I think you'll begin to understand.

Roughly a week ago, I was doing some stuff on Halo 4, on its Forge feature, on this map called Ravine. For those of you who don't know, Forge is a map editor for the latest games in the Halo series that lets us create variants of maps. Anyways, I was trying to set up this small base structure, which was kind of like a cube and had three small floors connected by lifts. I had put about two hours into the damn thing and was looking very forward to being done with it.

Then the game blacked out.

I don't mean that the session ended. Literally the whole screen just went black. No score recounts, nothing. I realized that I hadn't bothered to save, and I was absolutely furious. But, just as quickly as it had gone, the screen came back. The camera view was exactly the same as it had been when the game had blacked out. The blackout itself had lasted perhaps ten seconds. My map was still there, as was

everything I had placed in it. I let out a tremendous sigh of relief, then immediately saved the freaking map before something else unexpected could happen. After this scare, I was thinking about getting off, just as soon as I had finished the top level of the structure. But my night was only just beginning.

I was setting the final pieces of the base structure in place when I heard the most curious sound from outside. I actually decided it to be just a trick of the sound system at first, a glitch of some kind. But then I heard it again: the unmistakable laugh of a child. It came a third time, fifteen seconds later, a giggle that sounded like a boy, maybe five years old, having lots and lots of fun. But the really odd thing was, it sounded extremely clear, not like voices over the microphone. I checked my party status, and indeed I had not started a party. Nor was there anyone else in my game. I was completely alone on my Forge map. I heard the sound again, this time bothering to listen very closely, and without a doubt it was coming from within the game itself! So what the hell could it be?

I immediately flew in Monitor Mode out of the structure and looked around the place. I could see nothing out of the ordinary: no moving objects, and certainly no five year old boy. I really wasn't sure what to think at this point. As I headed to the other end of the map, I heard the laugh again, coming from a platform on the ground (which I had laid to set the location for the opposite base structure). I flew down to investigate. At the spot where the sound had seemed to originate, there was absolutely nothing. I looked around wildly, trying to spot something, anything. Then I heard the sound of small footsteps running away from me! They were a pitter-patter, like a small child might make if they were running with rubber boots on, across wet grass. Without hesitation, I followed the sound. The sound led me up a slope, taking me to the middle of the map. As soon as I got to the slope's highest point, the footsteps stopped, and were instantly replaced by a very loud bout of giggling. Except that this giggling was much different. It was the same voice, but not the same innocent coy laughter I had heard before. This was much louder and more boisterous, almost like a belly laugh. It carried on for almost two minutes, with me just sitting there listening to it, not having any idea what the fuck was going on or what to do. As the laughing progressed, it became louder, and after ninety seconds had passed, it sounded almost insane, because no healthy child could possibly laugh like that, for each burst of sound seemed so forced and took so much breath that it seemed within no bounds of sanity. After this had been going on for roughly two minutes, the laughter abruptly stopped. Just instantly, mid-laugh. And then the voice actually spoke to me. It still used the child's tone, but this time I could detect a hint of something beneath the innocent exterior. "Do you want to play with me? I want to play!" Then the voice silenced altogether. I just sat there in the map for some minutes in Monitor Mode, not changing my camera view, just floating in that same place, and wondering if what I had heard had not been some exotic daydream. I waited for five more minutes, but the voice did not come back. I was rather tired at the time (I don't remember the time, but it was probably beyond midnight), and I began to entertain the thought that perhaps I was daydreaming. So I turned back towards the base structure, eager to finish it and be done with all of this for a dayâ€”

The entire base structure was upside down.

I just stared at it with my jaw dropping down. It was as if someone

had taken hold of the base structure and just flipped it. Every single piece was still connected to every other piece that it had been before. But the top level was now lying face down in the ground, and the bottom of the lowest level was facing the sky. I was convinced I was being hacked or something, yet had never heard of a hack quite like this. I flew back into the base structure and looked around. The weapon and object placements had moved along with everything else: somehow, the entire structure had simply inverted its orientation.

I was wandering around the middle floor when I heard the footsteps again. They had the same pitter-patter frequency, but this time they sounded heavier, as though they no longer belonged to a child. I followed it through the structure. Despite the fact that I could not actually see what I was following, the sounds were loud enough that I could reliably keep up. The footsteps led me on a complex path which took me through all the floors. There were certain moments where the footsteps would just stop suddenly. Then I would look around the room for maybe a minute. And then I would hear a tapping sound on one of the walls on the other side of that floor. They were very subtle and hard to hear at first, and sounded like a hand knocking with their knuckles. This kind of thing happened several times during the chase, and every time I would always eventually pick up on the tapping. Then I would fly over to where it was coming from, and the footsteps would resume, with me of course following closely. Did I feel as though I was being played with, and/or led somewhere? YES! But I didn't know what else to do, except just follow this thing or whatever it actually was through the base structure. It is worth noting that because the base structure was upside down, I did not understand how a person (even an invisible person) could lead me through the structure in such a fashion, because all the doors were too high up from the floor/ceiling and all the grav lifts were pointing the wrong way (that being downwards). But somehow, I ended up visiting and then revisiting every room within the base structure (of which there were maybe a dozen small chambers).

I completely lost track of time while the chase was going on, and when I glanced at my watch I discovered it to be two in the fucking morning. Though the footsteps were still leading me through the base, I was admittedly getting tired of this little game, and decided that no matter what strange or intriguing things were going on, it was time to sleep. So I abruptly ended the game and turned off the console. Then I went to bed and didn't wake up until noon the next day. I got up not immediately remembering the events of the previous night. In fact, it wasn't until I got on Halo that evening that I fully remembered things. When I suddenly did, I immediately got into my map on Ravine.

Because things had gotten so crazy last evening, I hadn't saved more recently than the point when I had still been working on the base structure. And to my relief, the game loaded with everything being normal: the base structure was upright and everything was in its proper place. I decided that the weird things I remembered really had been a daydream I had experienced, and that none of those strange events had actually happened. So I did some matchmaking for a couple of hours, and then got back to forging (I still needed to finish that freaking base structure). I was very naive to dismiss what I had already experienced: Because even more things happened that evening.

I managed the base structure I had been working on, and finally was able to move on to its planned twin on the other side of the map. I had always been going for a symmetrical map, so the layouts of the two structures had to be very nearly exact. I had put up most of the walls for the second structure's ground floor when the game blacked out again. This blackout lasted only about half as long as the one from the day before, and this time, about halfway through the duration of the black screen, I thought I saw a flash of something. It only lasted for a small fraction of a second, but I thought I saw a curved line of white and red. It was something like that. And then, just like last time, the game came right back, just as it had been. Of course, this instance immediately brought back the memories from the day before, and suddenly realizing that they had not been a daydream, I immediately started searching for the childlike voice and the footsteps. I did not find either. I looked everywhere, but came upon nothing. But then something else started happening.

It took me several minutes to realize this was going on, but ever since the blackout, the lighting of the map had been slowly changing. I had been searching for the voice for perhaps ten minutes when I gradually noticed that the light from the sky was turning from white to yellow to orange. I opened the item placement roster to make sure there weren't any FXs out on the map (there were not). And then, with lack of better judgment, I went back to building the second base structure. I'm not sure why I was this stupid. I guess I thought that the gradual change in lighting was just a glitch. In any case, I just continued forging. But I didn't do so for long, because soon the lighting had fully changed to red. And when I looked up, I saw to my horror that the first base structure was floating in pieces.

By floating in pieces, I mean that all of its pieces had become separated from one another and begun to drift into the air, away from each other. It looked as though the structure was exploding in slow motion. I immediately flew over and tried to grab onto the objects, but for some reason I couldn't. The game wouldn't let me select them. So there was nothing I could do but watch the base structure fly apart. I was getting almost angry at this point. I decided I would reload the map and hope everything would be back in its proper place. But the menu wouldn't activate. I must have hit the START button on my controller at least two dozen times, but nothing happened. And just after I had given up with the menu, that was when things got really crazy.

The lighting had still been changing, and at this point, the light from the sky was blood red. And when I briefly looked out across the map, I noticed that the ocean and all the water underneath the map had vanished. It was simply gone. And in its place was an abyss of nothingness. I just looked around stunned, because if all of this was some glitch, then it was one hell of a glitch. But things didn't stop there. Because as I was gaping at the absence of the ocean, I began to notice little tiny black spikes jutting up from the ground. I hadn't noticed them before because they had started out shorter than the grass. They were shaped like thick thorns, colored jet black, and their tips were sparking as though they were electrified. I studied a small cluster of them for a few minutes, and I noticed that they were actually growing. They started out perhaps an inch tall, and after a minute they had doubled in size.

Then I looked up and saw that half the map was spinning out of control.

I need to mention at this point that the map Ravine is split into two sections, which are both effectively islands: a long grassy plain (the side I was on) and a built-in structure with a large flat floor. The two islands are split by a great ravine (where the map gets its name) which goes all the way down to the water (when things are normal). But things were most definitely not normal this time, because the alternate island had risen into the air. As I watched with stunned fascination, the island then began to spin, rotating slowly at first, then getting faster and faster, to the point where the island became a blur. As this was going on, the framerate dropped down to single digits.

This was the point when I turned off my console. Things had simply gotten too insane for me to continue with this any further. I did turn it back on and then revisit my map to make sure everything was reset to normal (it was), but then I unplugged the console and went off to do something else. As I mentioned at the beginning of this entry, I did contact Microsoft about this. But no one I was able to talk to had any idea what I was talking about, and most thought I was pranking them, so those talks went nowhere. It was several days before I got on the Xbox again. Honestly, I think I was a little afraid of the console, and after what had happened who wouldn't be? But eventually, I did do a little matchmaking. Because both experiences had happened on the same Forge map, and while I was in Forge Mode, I had assumed that the strange occurrences were limited to that location of the game.

I was wrong.

As of the writing of this entry, nothing quite as spectacularly bizarre as the red-light-and-rotating-island experience has occurred. Of course, I have been doing only matchmaking and campaign since then. However, during some War Games matches I have briefly encountered more black electrified spikes. It has only been on a couple of occasions. I would say, one out of every five or six matches has had these spikes suddenly appear somewhere on the map. These spikes would be about as tall as a Scorpion Tank, and players would take shield damage if they got too close. Also, the spikes would very slowly increase in size as the match progressed. These instances haven't turned out to be problematic yet, but I suspect that they could, and this makes me very nervous.

There is also one more thing, which happened just an hour ago and spurred me to begin this journal. As I was about to get off from a session of War Games, I noticed that I had a new message. The title was just a smiley face, and the FROM box was completely empty, so I have no way of knowing where it came from. But it was the message itself which even now chills me deeply:

I WANT TO PLAY. PLEASE COME AND PLAY WITH ME!

## 2. Sid's Story

### ENTRY # 2 "SID'S STORY"

Some new developments have happened as far as the phenomena on my Xbox are concerned. There are several new events, and just like the first entry, I'll just start at the beginning. Since the last entry,

the giant electrified spikes have still been appearing during War Games matches. And they've increased in frequency. I'd say that now, one in three games have them. It's starting to get really annoying. Fortunately, they don't make the game unplayable or anything. It just kind of shakes things up in a bad way when, suddenly, a giant spike takes over the center of a small map, and then no one can go there because they'll lose their shields almost instantly. But this isn't really what I'm writing to talk about. Because more intense things have been going on, and also, my search into what's going on has reached a new stage as well.

A few days ago, I was doing some campaign on Halo 4. It was the beginning of the game's sixth level, which opened up in this large spaceship hangar. There were lots of NPCs about, just friendly soldiers. I was supposed to walk to the opposite end of the hangar and get into the cockpit of an air vehicle which would take me out of the ship to the next area. But things didn't go quite that way. I did make it to the air vehicle (which was called a Pelican) but could not get inside of it. There simply wasn't a prompt. There was no entering it. Concerned, I tried restarting the level, only to discover that the menu had disappeared. This instantly brought back memories of just a few days before, with the red sunlight and the floating, rotating island on Ravine. By this point, I did have some indication of what I was dealing with (not really, but effectively for that time) and so I really should have known better than to remain in that game. I should have instantly just turned the console off and restarted everything.

But I didn't.

Maybe it was the intrigue of seeing what would happen this time, I dunno. But for whatever reason, I continued playing. There wasn't much else for me to do but roam the hanger, since my only way out of it wasn't working. For the first few minutes, things progressed as normal. The UNSC soldiers just stood around, doing the menial routines they had all been pre-programmed to go through. I just wandered around, maybe hoping I would stumble on an Easter Egg or something. I was seriously starting to lose interest and considering hitting the ON button when everything suddenly went silent. I turned around and instantly knew that the strange phenomena had returned.

I'm not sure how to describe this next part, because it doesn't fit into words very well. The NPCs had all moved to the center of the chamber, where they were not moving at all. And they had formed themselves (or \_been formed into\_, I am starting to think) a very strange how to say this a very strange structure of sorts. Each soldier was splayed out, and holding onto the soldiers immediately next to them with their arms and legs. Together, the soldiers formed a web or network or something, which created a dome-like thing which took up the center of the hangar. Think of one of those human castles at the Olympics, where a team of professional gymnasts would hoist themselves into things resembling structures. Now make them 100 times odder looking and 1000 times creepier, and you have what I was looking at, at that moment. I just stared for maybe a minute (something I have been doing rather frequently in the last few weeks).

And then the soldiers started to scream. All at once. It was, hands down, the worst sound I have ever heard in my life. Each soldier

sounded as if they were being tortured, like they were being incinerated or something. They were unified into one, a great shrill scream of the most terrible pain. It was so horrible, so loud and so awful. I shut off my Xbox, not wanting the neighbors to come over wondering if I was murdering someone. I haven't been back on Xbox Live since. I think I might be in a recovery period, because there's only so much of this shit I can take. Every time, things have gotten more intense and insane.

I think it's about time I move on to the next important thing that's happened, which is the main thing concerning this entry, and is actually a good thing: I've met someone. Someone else who's having these same kinds of things happen to them has come forward. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I had posted the first entry on a creepypasta forum site, on its own thread. Most of the responses I got to it were people commenting on how fucked up it all was (and believe me, I know!) But eventually, someone PMed me, saying that he had been going through very similar things, and for much longer than I had. His profile name was The Great Wyvern's Pet Soufflé, but he said that I could call him Sid. We very quickly opened a chatbox over Gmail, and we started talking about the phenomena. Sid already knew my story from having read it on the forum. So it wasn't long before he started to tell me his story, from the beginning:

His first encounter was almost five weeks ago, and had also been on Forge, except that this was on Halo: Reach. He was loading a fresh version of Forge World, because he was planning on building a completely new map from scratch. He noted that the game took much longer to load than normal, almost thirty seconds. And when the game was about to start (at the black screen which always appears just before a game begins), the screen also took much longer, roughly ten seconds. He said he saw a flash of something (just as I had right before the spinning-island occurrence). It seemed that he got a better look at what it was than I, for he actually was able to give a guess as to what it looked like: a bloody smile, with red glowing points of eyes above a U shaped grin.

Then the game had started. Everything at first looked normal. Sid began flying around in Monitor Mode, looking for the best location to start making his map. Then he came upon a part of Forge World, called The Island, which is exactly as its name implies. It was what was on The Island which caused Sid to stare: a very large structure already existed. The structure was box-shaped and very large, almost as tall as the peak of The Island. And sticking up from the ceiling of the structure, rising even higher, was a giant symbol which was made out of Extra Large Size bridge pieces. Half of the bridge pieces had been curved somehow, and together with the still-straight pieces, they formed a shape: a circle inside a triangle. At the center of the triangle was a red light emitter, casting the shape in a crimson glow. Sid then described the look of the structure itself: shaped like an almost perfect cube, with a square opening on its west-facing side, seemingly placed to be an entrance.

Sid floated through this entrance gingerly (he was still in Monitor Mode). From outside, it looked like complete blackness on the inside. He was almost right, but there was a small amount of lumination, of blue and purple light, but where it was coming from Sid could not discern. It was very difficult to see, for the lights were exceptionally dim. This became even worse when the entrance was suddenly covered by a piece of wall, which came down from out of

nowhere. Sid flew over to the door, discovering to his dismay that he could not grab onto it. The same was true for the other walls of the structure: Sid was trapped. This was also the moment when Sid tried activating the menu (finding, of course, that it could not be opened). Sid was seriously considering rebooting his console (he had figured out that something was terribly wrong by that point), yet a small sense of curiosity did keep him going, against his better judgment. That is to say, he decided to explore the structure.

Things only got weirder from this point. The interior of the structure revealed a closely packed network of rooms upon each floor. There were no objects or furniture, just walls and rooms, all lit by that painfully subtle blue and purple lighting. Things remained uninteresting until Sid tried moving in a straight line for a long distance. I say tried becauseâ€|wellâ€|okay, I'll try to explain. You see, Sid wanted to know exactly where the outer walls of the structure were because, aside from the floor and the wall of the entrance, he could not see the other four walls. So he decided to move in one direction through the lowest (ground-level) floor. He started at the entrance room, chose the northern path leading from it, and then moved forward. He traveled a very surprising distance, and nearly twenty seconds (he estimates) went by while he speed-flew down the hallway. He stopped after twenty seconds because he had ended upâ€|back at the entrance.

More than a little bit puzzled at this, he repeated his path, keeping a keen eye out for any teleporters (as if he could possibly have missed going through a teleporter). And of course, he found none. And upon even further exploration, he realized that the area that each level took up before it looped back to the entrance was actually greater than the area taken up by The Island itself. This of course seemed impossible, since before he had entered, he had definitely seen the structure existing within the island, on its western side. So how could the dimensions of each floor be longer than the island was across? It made no damn sense. The only thing he was left to consider, insane as it was, was that the structure was larger on the inside than it was on the outside. Now, I realize that many people who read that last line will probably start thinking about Doctor Who and his TARDIS almost immediately. And after everything that has happened to me (and Sid) I'm willing to consider pretty much anything. Though I will say: I don't think any incarnation of the Doctor would be responsible for anything asâ€|sinisterâ€|as what me and Sid had been going through.

But I'm getting off track. I need to continue explaining, in my words, Sid's story. Because it wasn't long after his realization about the nature of the structureâ€|that he realized he wasn't alone in it. He was still futilely looking for the walls of the structure when he noticed that, a distance down the hallway he happened to be looking down at the time, there was no light whatsoever. Not even the dim blue and purple hues, justâ€|nothing, except for darkness. The blue and purple light slowly went away as Sid watched. The darkness seemed to be creeping down the corridor towards him. And as it neared, he saw something else about it: there were two small points of light, right next to each otherâ€|\_like eyes.\_ And they were glowing blood red. At more or less the same moment, Sid then began to hear things: a low laughter, deep and male, and rather giggly. It sounded like a very deep-throated person who had just thought of something cruel and funny. In other words, it sounded both playful



and maniacal (and I cannot imagine that being a good combination!) When the darkness began to accelerate towards him, red eyes gleaming, Sid realized that he was being chased. So he turned, hit the left trigger, and flew down the hallway (in the opposite direction) as fast as he could.

From this point on, it turned into a game of cat and mouse. The darkness was capable of traveling faster than Sid could fly. So instead, Sid had to resort to hiding. He stayed off of the hallways, because that was where the darkness patrolled the most. You see, the larger hallways were in a grid formation, such that they formed the boundaries for square clusters of smaller rooms. These clusters were where Sid hid from the darkness. He mentioned in great detail how he could always tell that it was coming. The lights, through the doorways of whichever room he was hiding in, would dim until there was no light (however subtle it had been to begin with) coming from outside. Then Sid would hear laughter. This was higher pitched laughter, sounding almost like children's laughter, except that there was something about it—it was distorted in some way, such that it didn't seem quite human. But it did sound sinister. This laughter would increase in loudness as the darkness drew near. Most times it would just continue on down the hallway, probably only bothering to check some of the nearby rooms. Sid was lucky like this on several pass-by encounters with the darkness. But luck must run out eventually, and for Sid, it did. Each square cluster of rooms was like a small maze, and there were certain paths which led nowhere. Sid had just reached the end of one of these nowhere-paths when he heard the darkness creeping up behind him. He turned around just in time to see two points of light—

And then the console shut off.

The Xbox didn't explode or anything (though Sid was probably expecting just about anything at that point). It just turned off, suddenly and instantly. Sid turned it back on, and everything worked properly, to which Sid was very relieved. Well, almost everything. Sid had actually saved the map with the odd structure on it, just before entering. He loaded it back up again, perhaps hoping to explore that structure further. What he found instead was that the surface of the entire map had been replaced with gigantic black spikes the size of skyscrapers, which rose up taller than the height boundary of the map. The temple structure was gone, for every single surface was covered with spikes. Not just huge spikes, but spikes of all sizes. Even the trees and shrubs had spikes coming out of them. Sid sent me a few screenshots of the place while telling me all of this, and they are beyond a doubt the same spikes I saw during the spinning-island occurrence. After seeing all of this, Sid of course tried to delete the map, thinking that perhaps the entire landscape was just some horrible glitch. The last discovery of his story is that there was no DELETE option in the file menu for that map. He could not get rid of it. Even now, it still sits on his Xbox's hard drive. The name of the map file had been replaced with a smiley face, colored in red.

And this is where Sid's story ends. Just like me, he has recently been finding random giant spikes in War Games matches. And just like me, he has been periodically receiving messages over Xbox Live, from someone anonymous, who keeps telling him that they want to play with him. Whatever is happening to us, the cause is clearly the same, whomever or whatever that may be. Sid and I are now united, and

determined to find out what is causing all of this. Though to be perfectly honest, if we do eventually discover the source of this, I am slightly afraid of what we may find.

### 3. It's Not A Hacker

#### 3 " IT'S NOT A HACKER

There have been some huge new developments. Let me just say right off the bat: we know more about what is causing this. But this realization has only really created more questions because—more specifically, we know what it isn't. I think those who read this will understand things better if I first just explain everything that happened.

It was a very good thing that I had made friends with Sid, not just because it meant I wasn't alone anymore, but because he was an experienced network programmer (which he did for a living), and as such, he was very good at hacking. So shortly after the events of the last entry, the two of us decided it would be a very good idea to connect his PC to his xbox, and then the two of us would go on Xbox Live together, wait for the strange occurrences to initiate, and then Sid would use his computer to track the source of the person or people we thought were behind it. Because from what Sid explained to me, whenever an uninvited user invades an online session, he leaves a trace, kind of like a digital trail, which someone else with know-how (such as Sid) could follow to eventually uncover the hacker. This seemed like a brilliant course of action, and we both felt empowered as we both logged on at a pre-arranged time. We felt as though we might actually be able to solve this thing for once and for all.

The occurrences were slowly shifting in location to War Games, but most of them still seemed to happen on Forge, so for this session we chose the Halo 4 map Impact, which was set in space, on a series of asteroids which for some reason had micro-gravity. There were two main islands (the two largest asteroids, which both had relatively flat top surfaces), and surrounding them in all directions (as a backdrop to the map) was a beautiful nebula of many brilliant colors, which looked like a rainbow on steroids. Impact was undoubtedly the most pleasing looking map in the Halo 4 set, and this was probably the main reason why we chose it: if the occurrences started happening here, we would know very quickly.

Things didn't start out very interestingly. We had to wait a long time before anything began to happen. Mostly, we just flew around the map in monitor mode and put rocks places and set up walls and stuff. I dunno what we were making. I think Sid had some kind of space station in mind, because he worked mostly in the center of the map, putting together a series of chambers connected by airlocks. I just waited around for a bit, and then eventually started helping him after I got bored. We had been in the game for maybe a half hour or so when things started happening.

I don't know how long it took us to notice that the surroundings on the outside of the map were getting darker. The nebulae and the stars were slowly going out. They had likely been doing so for several minutes before I looked up from the space station we were building (which I was focusing surprisingly hard on) and realized that space was getting darker. I called out to Sid, and immediately he took a

look at his computer.

Indeed, there was an outside presence.

Sid wouldn't talk to me at this point, but I could hear a mad amount of typing going on from the other end of his mike. I really, badly wanted to know what was happening, and it was at least a minute before he finally updated me: "I'm trying to track the source. I don't think this guy knows I'm on to him yet. I've been following his digital trail, and I'm almost there!" Then he took a deep breath. "Holy shit dude, it leads straight into the Xbox Live servers! I think this might be someone who works for Microsoft!"

As he was talking, I had another thing to focus my attention on as well: virtually all the light from space had gone out, leaving nothing but a blackness of terrifying depth, like looking into a mirror on the side of a swimming pool and seeing an infinite abyss of darkness. And then two points of red light appeared, like stars emerging from fleeing night clouds. This was followed by a bloody grin, which slowly blossomed into existence like an evil flower, spreading across the background of the topside of the map. It was the same thing both me and Sid had seen flash during a black screen, just before earlier games had wierded out. And then a hand—a giant bony skeletal hand made of shadow—materialized as well, and slowly reached out towards me, its grasp the size of a small city block. It was like a Stephen Gammell drawing on steroids.

"Uh—Sid?" I called into my mike. But Sid had no idea this was happening, instead having directed all his focus on his laptop.

"I think I've almost got this sucker!" he exclaimed, thinking I was asking for an update. "It's definitely someone in Microsoft, because the trail led me directly into the Xbox Live servers themselves. Now, if I can just track it to a specific terminal or laptop, where the hacker is inputting commands from—"

I called out to Sid again, but he was simply too busy. By now, the nightmare face (I \_swear\_ I will have nightmares about that thing!) had descended down towards the main island of the map, and stopped just above the map, as if to observe it. Then my camera flashed, and I suddenly found myself in player mode (standard human form), staring up at the face. I mashed the up arrow in my controller's directional pad, but nothing happened. I heard something off to me left, and looked to find a creature standing there, looking at me. It was nothing I had seen before in a halo game, and looked like some horrible glitch, if not for the way it stood and moved. It was composed of a bunch of bulky shapes, all the same dark red color, and each individual piece of this thing was composed of only a small number of polygons. But together, the objects were stacked into something resembling a humanoid figure. It had two arms and two legs, along with a head that was really just an elongated tetrahedron with one side always looking at me. Its legs were long sinewy things, and its forearms looked more like blades, because they were spikes which stretched outwards from the figure's torso like grafted swords. If one were to somehow take a notebook and make it into a life-sized origami figure inspired from Slenderman, and then paint it blood red, then it would probably look very much like what I was seeing.

"KILL HIM!" a voice shouted from above, so loudly and coldly that it made me jump in my living room. The grinning face in the sky had

spoken.

At those words, the glitched figure suddenly stepped forwards on its disturbing legs. Though it took each step slowly, the length of its legs allowed it to move across the island very quickly. \_And it was moving after me.\_ Without hesitation, I turned and ran. There was a bridge of small floating rocks which connected the two main islands of the map. I decided to head for it, to put as much distance between me and the glitched thing as possible. "Sid!" I shouted into my microphone.

"I'm working on it!" he shouted back. "Something strange is happening. I've definitely followed the trail into the Xbox Live servers themselves, but something odd is going on. I can't trace it to any specific terminal or laptop. I expected at least some decoy device, a false trail orâ€|just something. But I'm not even making it that far. As soon as I investigate the serversâ€|uh, I don't even know how to explain it. It's likeâ€|the source is actually composed of multiple sources like aâ€|a network, or something."

I had reached the rock bridge, and instantly leaped off. The glitched figure was right behind me. I made the jump, just barely. But so did the glitched figure, leaping off of the main island like a grasshopper and then taking the impact of the fall in a crouched position. The game of cat and mouse was still afoot, and so I raced for the next rock of the bridge.

As I was fleeing, Sid continued talking, perhaps more to himself aloud than to me: "Dude, I thinkâ€|I can't believe I'm saying this, butâ€|hackers aren't comprised of networks. I mean, they've been known to make use of cloud computing on occasion, but the hacking operation itself, even if done by a group, comes from only a select few sources. It has to, because otherwise whatever session is being hacked will overlaod. I keep trying to find the exact server it's coming from, but every time I think I've found it, the whole network suddenly jumps to a different server, in a fraction of a second. \_And hackers don't do that.\_ They always operate from one server. But this thing is likeâ€|an entity. Whatever is doing this, I don't know how the hell they're doing it. Iâ€|um, I never thought I'd say this, butâ€|I'm not sure that whatever is causing this to happen is actually humanâ€|"

I took in a breath mid-leap between rocks, the glitched figure right behind me. In the back of my mind, I had always considered what Sid was saying. I mean, there's only so much weirdness that can happen before you start to have weird thoughts about what's causing it. But I had never, up unto this point, seriously considered the occurrences to be anything a human couldn't do. "Sid, what're you saying?" I asked.

From his end of the connection, I was actually able to hear Sid gulp. "That this thingâ€|the only explanation I can come up with at this pointâ€|is that it's some kind of artificial intelligence."

"Are you serious?"

Sid's frustration began to show in his voice. "Dude, I have \_never\_ even heard of any hacker or hacker group behaving like this. Thisâ€|thingâ€|is a whole nother ball game entirely. It is taking all the rules of online hacking and just tossing them jovially out the

window. Nothing it is doing right now makes any sense if this is just some guy or guys at a computer. It has to be something else, something that actually lives inside the Xbox Live server system itself. I know this explanation sounds crazyâ€|but nothing else fits." I could hear fear in him now. "Dudeâ€|I don't think we have any idea what we're dealing with."

A chill washed down my spine like a cold shower as I hopped along the remaining rocks of the bridge, the glitched figure hot on my heels. I made the final jump, nearly sliding off into the abyss below, just barely managing to hoist myself onto the cliff of the second main island. I raced up the subtle slope as the glitched figure continued to pursue me, stabbing the rock wall with its arms and legs like pickaxes, and then stretching upwards after me.

I got onto level ground just in time to hear Sid scream. He said something about his screen turning red. I would later learn that his computer had red-screened and then shut down for no apparent reason. With his computer out of play, Sid was forced to return his attention to the game, and instantly I heard him gasp and curse when he realized what had happened to the map. "Ohmygod, what the hell is that thing? Is it chasing you? And why can't I get into monitor mode?" A low cackling sound suddenly emanated from the sky, and we both looked up to see a giant skeletal hand reaching down towards us like the plague of Passover. Knowing better than to continue at this point, Sid shut off his xbox to force the session to end. And so did I. Thus concluded what was by far the most intense occurrence we had encountered yet.

\* \* \*

><p>Upon reflecting on the events that had just occurred, I had some mixed reactions. The silver lining was: we had some idea what the nature of this entity was. We still didn't really know what it was, but we did at least know that it <em>wasn't<em>: human. According to Sid's comments when we spoke over Skype a short time later, he stated that he was absolutely convinced it could not possibly have been a hacker. This entity had followed none of the rules of hacking whatsoever. And also, it had revealed itself to exist within Xbox Live itself. It did not emit from one laptop or terminal, but instead moved throughout the server network like a phantom, instantly moving to another part of the server system whenever Sid had followed the trail close enough to it. And so, while our investigations into the occurrences had seen progress in terms of new information, we now had so many more questions than we had before, the main one being: what, really, was this thing? Sid suggested that the most likely explanation is that it is some kind of artificial intelligence. I am inclined to agree with him, simply because I don't have any better ideas. But the important thing is: we still don't know. It could be anything, with the exception of a human being. We are both sure that this thing is digital, since everything it has done has had something to do with online networks, video games, and computer code. But that is where solid information ends. These occurrences are no less mysterious, and now might be even more so, because the most likely explanation (a hacker) has been thrown out.

That event is the main subject of this entry, but there is another thing still. A few days later, I returned to the maps that had seen the occurrences and looked around. Sid had put on his File Share the map where Forge World had been taken over by skyscraper-size spikes,

so I went on that one as well. I guess I was just trying to find something more. The events on Impact had left me with so many questions that I felt like I just had to learn something else. The first map I went to was the map I had been making when the occurrences had first started. At first, everything appeared to be normal, and if someone else had gone here instead of me, they probably wouldn't have been aware anything was unusual with it. The two base structures were still there, one completely and one only partly built. The cool light symbols I had made for each, hexagons with six colored lights at each point, still stared at me from the walls of each structure. I flew around, getting kind of bored, until I came to the back wall of the completed base structure. I was immediately glad I had returned to the map.

There was a drawing made in jet black on the wall. I hadn't noticed it before because I had never thought to come back here during the first occurrences. At first glance, it was like a vortex of some kind, and it had maybe a dozen numbers in it, shaped into a spiral that went into the vortex, basically a curved line of one digit numerals, with added strokes of black to make it look like a vortex. I didn't know what to make of it at the time, so I just took a screenshot of it and moved onto the next map. I next went to Sid's Forge World map. And I found another symbol there, the exact same one with the exact same numbers. It was in the warehouse section of the map, emblazoned on the ceiling in huge curved lines and numbers. I next went to the Impact map variant (which Sid had managed to save just before we had both turned off our Xbox's). Inside the building on the main island, on the inside of its curved wall, I found that same symbol a third time. It was at this point I realized: every map the entity had come onto, this symbol had been left behind. It had to be a mark of some kind, left by the entity as a statement that it had been there.

I immediately contacted Sid about this. He seemed very interested in this, and asked me about every single detail. There weren't that many details (the symbol being the only new thing), and so I eventually had to show him myself. After staring at the symbols on each Occurrence Map for a few minutes, he suddenly had an idea: we should both host a forum online regarding these occurrences. I immediately liked the idea. There was just so much stuff to discuss, and furthermore, I highly doubted that me and Sid were the only people the entity was terrorizing. There was no way of knowing how many others like us there might be. This called for a meeting place, one not connected to Xbox Live (so the entity would not have access to it). A place where victims of the entity could gather and discuss news, and most importantly not feel alone as I had before meeting Sid. And in any case, me and Sid were just two people. A dozen like-minded people, or maybe even a hundred (who knows how many the forum might attract) would be much more capable of getting to the root of these occurrences and "hopefully" stopping them.

So this is what we've done: with my input, Sid has created a forum website dedicated to the subject of the occurrences. With luck, this will be the mechanism by which we start fighting back. HOWEVER, I will not give the address here, because we've decided it cannot be open to just anyone. This might seem odd, but here's why: to most people reading these posts, the whole thing probably sounds completely crazy (I do not blame you!), and so if we let just anyone on, then probably the vast majority of visitors would just be trolls offering bullshit stories who just want some fun. Sid is adamant that

we cannot allow that. So only people genuinely affected by the occurrences will be let on, and here's how we're managing that: every map or digital location visited by the entity so far has had this symbol placed somewhere upon it. And within this symbol is the vortex of numbers. If you have seen this symbol, record the numbers along their curved line, starting from the outside and moving inside. The address of the forum is that sequence of numbers followed by ".com". Put this into your web browser, and it will take you there.

And so, that's where we're at. If you've personally been visited by the entity and have found that symbol in one or more locations, follow the above directions to reach the forum. Both me and Sid will be monitoring it daily to make note of any new visitors and/or information that comes up. That's all for now. I'll send the next post when significantly more information has been garnered.

End  
file.